

# Assurance Controversy in New England in 1636

by Ian Murray

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*The controversy of 1636-1638 in New England was a theological dispute over the question of assurance of salvation, with Anne Hutchinson and John Wheelwright on one side and the New England ministers on the other.*

**Duration:** 55:06

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:1-13, John 3:8, Romans 8:9, Romans 8:15-16, Galatians 3:7, Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 8:6

**Topics:** "Assurance Of Salvation", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

The sermon transcript discusses the controversy surrounding the assurance of salvation in the context of the New Covenant. The preacher, Carton, emphasizes the importance of true personal union with Christ by the Holy Spirit as the basis of assurance, rather than relying solely on outward behavior. The sermon also mentions a spiritual awakening in Massachusetts and the influx of books and biographies on the topic of assurance. The sermon concludes with a reassessment of the modern interpretation of the controversy and the potential for individuals to have a false assurance of salvation.

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## Transcript

I want to speak this morning on the controversy on assurance in New England in the years 1636-1638. And as I said yesterday, I think this was the very first theological controversy in North America, and certainly one of the most important that has ever occurred on this side of the Atlantic, and I hope of great relevance to us today. In the 1630s, New England was almost the only haven for the English Puritans who were being silenced and harried by the persecution of Archbishop Laud and the monarchy in England.

And therefore, from the year 1629, you will remember the landing of the first Puritans on Massachusetts Bay, followed by a much larger landing in 1630. And from then on, the number of settlers and ministers rapidly increased. But if New England was a haven for the Puritans, it was by no means a secure haven.

They were watched very carefully by the monarchy in London, they had a hostile and often fierce Indian population at their doorstep, and their safety, their security was by no means certain. And one consideration that was very foremost in their thinking was their own profession that they had left old England, not for material gain, but for spiritual prosperity under the ordinances of Christ. And they felt that if their hope failed, that they would bring discredit upon the gospel itself.

And for these reasons as well as others, the one thing that the New England Puritans could not afford in the 1630s was a controversy that would endanger their unity. And yet in 1636, that is precisely what happened. Its beginning was small, says John Winthrop, like Elijah's cloud, but it afterward spread the heavens.

And this is the controversy that has been called the Antinomian Controversy, or sometimes the Hutchinsonian Controversy, after the name of Anne Hutchinson, who was one of the principal instigators. Now, a word on the literature surrounding the controversy. The documentation, of course, comes from the 17th century, and a great deal of it was printed in the 17th century.

And the judgment of the churches right through into the middle of the 18th century to the time of Jonathan Edwards, the judgment of the churches established the guilt of the Antinomian Party and vindicated the position taken by the New England ministers. But in the last century, a new school of writers emerged which turned the tables on that interpretation. And they alleged the guilt of the ministers and the innocence of the so-called antinomians.

John Albro, writing in Boston in 1852, complained, and writing, you understand, as an evangelical Calvinist, he said, speaking of this new school of writers, that this controversy has, through the ignorance of some and the perverse spirit of others, been spoken of to the reproach, not of the guilty, but of those wise and holy men who, by the word of God and prayer, effectually resisted the evil and preserved the churches from this destructive era. Well, he says, now we are seeing men reproaching, not the guilty, but the innocent. Well, as the last century advanced and more books were published on the New England Puritans, the general attitude that was taken by the writers was simply to say that this controversy was very complex and obscure and, to use the words of George E. Ellis, who wrote 600 pages on the Massachusetts colony, he said it was a strife about words, abstruse metaphysical and technical forms of expression.

He says, terms were used as symbols and technicalities of strife and recourse must now be had to an unabridged dictionary to learn even their meaning. The technicalities of the old polemics ran into words of six and even seven syllables. It might even be, he said, that some haphazard reader catching under his eye this formidable word, antinomianism, may have supposed that it had something to do with a drug called antimony.

Well, that's pretty representative of the men who were writing about 1880, 1890. They looked upon the whole controversy as a matter of jargon and words. And, therefore, you would have supposed that with the 20th century, this controversy would finally have been laid to rest.

But, as many of you know, the very opposite has been the case. In the last 20 years, there has been an extraordinary output of books on this theme with innumerable authors, biographies bearing directly on this old controversy. Now, as we turn to the controversy, let me try to divide it in the following way.

First, a brief introduction on the figures in the controversy, some of the leading figures, and a short account of the controversy itself. Then, secondly, the modern interpretation of the controversy and the reasons why that interpretation are so important. Second, the modern interpretation and why that modern interpretation is important for our consideration.

Thirdly, John Cotton's teaching on assurance. And, fourthly, hopefully, a reassessment of the modern interpretation of the controversy. Well, a sketch of the controversy and some of the leading figures first.

As I mentioned, one principal figure was Anne Hutchinson. She crossed the Atlantic with her family in the year 1634 when she was a woman of 43 years of age. In that same year, 1634, she was admitted with her husband and with four of her children into the membership of the First Church of Boston.

There was, of course, at that time only one church in Boston with a membership of about 160-150 people. And the Hutchinsons joined this congregation then in the year of their arrival. The congregation had two, as we would say, ministers, elders, as they were then called.

One, a teaching elder, and the other called the pastor. The pastor was John Wilson. He had crossed in 1630 among the first comers and he was the first elder of the Boston congregation.

But then in 1633, the great John Cotton had come. And John Wilson was one of the first men in Boston to see the need for cotton being kept in the town. So, John Cotton became the teaching elder and John Wilson remained as pastor in the congregation.

Now, amongst the members of the congregation, living just across the road from Mrs. Hutchinson was the man whose name was mentioned yesterday, John Winthrop and his wife, Margaret. John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts. And he took considerable part in the controversy and his history, his journal, is essential reading in the understanding of the whole story.

Then there was John Wheelwright, the Reverend John Wheelwright, who was the brother-in-law of Anne Hutchinson. And apart from these individual names, almost all the ministers of Massachusetts were involved in some degree in the controversy that followed. There were then between 25 and 30 men, more than half of them graduates of the University of Cambridge, a few from Oxford, some of them the very foremost of the English Puritans.

These men, as I say, in some degree were involved. Now, the controversy developed in this way. Had you been living in Massachusetts in 1636, there were many preachers that you might have wished to hear.

And in the first church at Boston on Sunday mornings at nine o'clock when the service began, the preacher generally was John Carton. And Carton was preaching on the subject of the New Covenant. Or if you had gone a little way outside Boston to Newtown, now Cambridge, you could have heard Thomas Shepherd preaching on the Ten Virgins.

Now, both Carton and Shepherd had a similar concern, though they were approaching it differently. We mentioned yesterday the Puritan emphasis that true conversion is demonstrated by the evidence of holiness and sanctification. A new principle of life which brings forth fruit unto God.

But that emphasis had its own danger. In fact, it had more than one danger. One of the dangers was this.

The inner community where so many people were Christians, where the standard of morality and godliness was high, it was a temptation for many to adopt the outward life of godliness without the inward experience of grace. That was one danger. The other danger of this emphasis on holiness as a sign of conversion, the other danger was that it could easily develop in such a way that the basis of assurance became not the work of Christ alone, but the evidence in us of His grace.

In other words, assurance could come to be built upon what was to be found in us and in our hearts rather than wholly upon the work of Christ which we receive in justification. And of course, if that situation developed, you would have had a kind of legalism. And as you know in church history, unhappily, that has

often been the case where holiness has been so emphasized as a mark, as a proof of regeneration, you can get an introversion of the church upon the evidences of grace so that the centrality of justification can be obscured.

And there you have legalism. Now, I say in 1636, Thomas Shepard, John Cotton and other ministers were concerned in these directions. And Cotton's concern as he preached on the new covenant was to show the real basis of assurance and to show that a certain standard of behavior is no evidence of true salvation in itself because there must be behind that behavior, if it is true, real personal union with Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Now, this was the subject that was in the air. And bear in mind that in the last three or four years there had been a considerable spiritual awakening in Massachusetts. For example, the Boston church alone had received 63 new members.

I don't know how many of that number was made up of new arrivals. Some must have been. But it's quite apparent that there was a movement of the Spirit in the colony in the years from about 1633 to 1636.

And this discussion now on assurance was in part related to that. Now, the controversy surfaced and became a controversy in October 1636. And it was connected with this lady, Mrs. Anne Hutchinson.

Her husband was a deacon in the church and quite a well-to-do man in Boston. Mrs. Hutchinson was gifted as a nurse and as a midwife. She was also a woman of much personality and eloquence of speech.

And she had come to hold a women's meeting in her home to repeat sermons initially. But in the course of time, one can't exactly put a date to it. In the course of time, Mrs. Hutchinson herself became somewhat of a speaker, if not a preacher.

In October 1636, it was alleged that Mrs. Hutchinson was teaching that the Holy Spirit does not impart habits or fruits of grace to the Christian, but rather He is so united to the believer as personally to be their sanctification. He doesn't impart grace to the believer, but He is so united to the believer that the Holy Spirit is their sanctification. And accordingly, it was alleged that she argued that no sanctification can help to evidence our justification.

Our assurance of salvation is only in the Holy Spirit. Now these opinions were not accepted by Mrs. Hutchinson when they were put to her. But the controversy from this point onwards developed.

The General Court of Massachusetts meeting in December 1636 discussed it. The ministers were present. John Wilson, the pastor of Boston, warned the dissension that was evidently spreading.

And it was agreed that a fast day should be held in January 1637 on this account as well as others. And when this fast day was held in Boston, John Cotton first preached from Isaiah 58, Behold ye fast for strife and debate. It was a sermon well designed to pacify feelings and to fit the purpose of the day.

But he was followed by John Wheelwright who dealt with his text in a very different manner and insinuated and implied that there were a good number of ministers and others in New England who weren't preaching in a truly evangelical way but who were legal in their thinking. Well, what Wheelwright was suggesting was plainly stated shortly afterwards by a man called Stephen Greensmith. He asserted that all the New England ministers excepting Cotton, Wheelwright and perhaps Thomas Hooker, all of them taught a covenant of works.

They were legalists. The general court examined Wheelwright about his fast day sermon and he was placed upon a charge of sedition. Well, at this point the controversy was spreading far and wide.

The governor of this year was not Winthrop but Sir Henry Vane who was a young man of 24. He didn't remain governor for long but while he was there, he stirred up a good deal of agitation on behalf of what later were proved to be Mrs. Hutchinson's opinions. And one writer says, speaking of how these opinions spread through society, from the governor right down to the barber in Boston.

The barber, it was said, as soon as any were set down in his chair, he would be commonly cutting off their hair and the truth together. Well, the man who wrote that was Edward Johnson who arrived from England just at this point. And he was amazed at the dissension that he found in what he had expected to be a haven in New England.

And he says how in Boston there was a little nimble-tongued woman I met who said that she could bring me to one with whom she was acquainted of her own sex that would show me a way if I could attain to it even revelations full of such ravishing joy that I should never have cause to sorrow for sin as long as I lived. Well, Johnson not caring for this teaching left Boston for Newtown. And he reached it, he said, just as a drum was being beaten to call people to church.

Who is it, he said, who lectures at this town? Meeting a man on the road. The man replied, I see you are a stranger, newcomer, seeing you know not the man. It is one Mr. Shepherd.

Verily, said Johnson, you have hit it right. I am newcomer indeed and have been told since I came that most of your ministers are legal preachers. Only, if I mistake not, they told me that this man, Shepherd, preached a finer covenant of works than the other.

So, Johnson accompanied this other man down the road to hear Thomas Shepherd. Thomas Shepherd, he said, preached for more than two hours. The hourglass was turned over twice.

Said he was a pale man. But Johnson was enraptured with Shepherd's preaching. By the time Shepherd had finished, Johnson knew for sure that here at least was one fully evangelical preacher in New England.

Well, the controversy spread. Other people weren't satisfied as easily as Johnson. And it all came to a head in August of 1637 where the ministers of Massachusetts and Connecticut met in General Synod, the first synod or assembly held on this side of the Atlantic, August 30, 1637.

And a list of 82 errors were drawn up which were condemned by this synod. The synod continued for three weeks. And these errors center around this fundamental error.

The error that Christians know that they are in Christ only by the immediate witness of the Spirit of God. And that every true Christian has this immediate witness. In other words, the error was the Christian's assurance is related neither to his subjective condition nor to his spiritual conduct.

Now, let me just read you one or two of the errors in their own words. There is no inherent righteousness in the saints and graces are not in the souls of believers but in Christ only. Nothing but Christ is an evidence of my good estate.

A man is not effectually converted until he has full assurance. A man may not prove his election by his calling. A man cannot evidence his justification by his sanctification.

Or further, it is a fundamental, they said, and soul damning error to make sanctification an evidence of justification. Well, you can see the drift of 82 errors and they were all around this theme that we know that we are the sons of God only by an immediate assurance granted to us by the Holy Spirit. And that assurance is not to be related in any way to what we find within ourselves.

These errors were unanimously rejected by the entire body of ministers with the one exception of John Wheelwright. But although the errors were rejected, the Synod did not specify any individuals who actually taught these errors. And that, amongst other things, gave John Wheelwright and Mrs. Hutchinson the opportunity to continue with their teaching.

And that they did vigorously. So that in the November following of 1637, a general court was held. And it was adjudged that there could be no peace in the colony until Wheelwright and Mrs. Hutchinson were sent away.

Wheelwright then was banished. Mrs. Hutchinson was given to the following spring in view of the state of the winter. She was put under house arrest through the winter months and she was to be removed from the colony in the following spring.

Well, when the following spring came, the Boston church examined Mrs. Hutchinson for the first time. At the first meeting before the church, she recanted of one error, but she held to others, at which she was solemnly admonished by John Cotton. And then she was told to appear in a further week's time before the church to gauge the effect of the admonition.

When she reappeared for the second time, she produced a recantation of her errors. But she had no sooner produced the recantation than she went on to allege that these errors had never been her judgment. So it wasn't, strictly speaking, a recantation at all.

At which, says John Cotton, so many witnesses rose up to speak the contrary that she was cast out of our communion. In other words, she was cast out for lying. The actual record in the church, First Church of Boston, reads the 22nd of the first month, that's March, 1638.

Anne, the wife of our brother William Hutchinson, having on the 15th of this month been openly in the public congregation, admonished of several errors held by her, was on the same 22nd day cast out of the church for impenitently persisting in a manifest lie then expressed by her in open congregation. You understand then that having offered a recantation, she then went on to excuse herself that she had never really held these things at all, which was adjudged to be a manifest lie by the congregation. That then is a quick, as quick as I could make it, sketch of the controversy.

Now the modern interpretation. The modern interpretation is very different to the one that existed, as I mentioned, at the end of the last century. Emery Battis, who has a biography on Mrs. Hutchinson, he summarizes the last century attitude in these words.

He says, Every American is acquainted with the name of Anne Hutchinson. Her heroic defiance of the Puritan autocracy has won the admiration of liberal minds and gained her acclaim. Well that was the last century view.

Here was a woman who stood up against this body of ministers, resisted their despotism, and therefore was something of a heroine. But that's not the modern view, although that comes into the modern view a little. The modern view has gone right back into the theology of the controversy.

And the modern writers have judged that Mrs. Hutchinson's claim that the ministers of New England were legalists, that that claim, after all, is true. Now many of you know the name of the late Perry Miller. And he and others have argued this at great length.

That these New England ministers taught a sort of covenant of grace which was really a covenant of works. That God does something and man does something. That faith is an act of the will.

That it requires man's cooperation to his salvation. And therefore they said that Mrs. Hutchinson's claim that the majority of these men were legalists was true. One recent writer says, with the exception of John Cotton, the men in Massachusetts Bay and later Connecticut stressed works more than grace.

Well, the mention of John Cotton brings us to the foundation of the whole modern claim. It is asserted that Anne Hutchinson was right in distinguishing Cotton from his fellow ministers. Cotton, it said, I quote, was preaching an entirely different doctrine of conversion.

That's Norman Pettit's claim. Lazar Ziff, who has written several books on New England, he says that Cotton only among the legalists, quote, was able to break through to a new perception. And they argue that Mrs. Hutchinson was really only the mouthpiece of John Cotton.

Anne Hutchinson proceeded to act upon the teaching of John Cotton. And that is claims that from Cotton, Mrs. Hutchinson drew the main minds of her doctrine. Well, that's repeated endlessly in all the modern books.

Mrs. Hutchinson was really only putting into words clearly understood by the average Boston person what Cotton himself was teaching. Now, I believe and I am prepared to say I'm sure that this modern interpretation is of great significance. And I give you two reasons.

One is that if it's true, it must radically affect our judgment of John Cotton. Well, you may think that doesn't matter very much. But really, John Cotton was one of the greatest theologians in the English speaking world.

A man who ought to be read. A man who ought to be esteemed highly. But I say if this modern interpretation is true, our judgment of Cotton is radically affected, and in this way.

As I mentioned in that August Synod in 1637, all the ministers, including Cotton, condemned these errors. And yet, the modern writers say that these errors were basically Cotton's own errors. Norman Pettit argues that in the Synod, Cotton denied what had been a basic tenet of his public theology.

And another writer says that nothing in Cotton's life is so hard to excuse as his pronouncing sentence upon Anne Hutchinson that was in March 1638. In other words, if this interpretation is right, John Cotton was a weak and cowardly man. And when he saw that Mrs. Hutchinson was being dealt with, he failed to stand by the teaching that he himself had inspired.

So, some people have called Cotton a trimmer, a coward, a false friend, and these words are true, if the interpretation is true. Now, there's a second reason why this interpretation is important, and this is much more significant. If the modern interpretation is true, then our whole assessment of English Puritanism is affected by it.

The preachers of New England were really the flower of English Puritanism. Now, I don't think, and I hope, that nobody today would say that the Puritans have to be read for the finest exegesis of Scripture, for the most scientific handling of the text of the Word of God in an exegetical way. I don't think that is true.

We all know, do we not, the great work of commentators that have lived and taught since the Puritans. But although that is true, the Puritans, we believe, par excellence, are the doctors of the Christian life. They are men who were physicians, true physicians of souls, in experimental handling of the theology of the Bible.

There, they have no superiors, and therefore, one reads the Puritans today, one ought to read them, for their value in that area. But, if this charge is true, that these men were really legalists after all, well then, surely, there is no reason to read them at all. The one thing that makes them valuable is that they were doctors of the Christian life.

If they weren't that, well then, they are nothing at all. And therefore, Perry Miller, having brought the New England Puritans back into prominence, he only sinks them lower than they ever were before. I say this controversy is therefore very important for our assessment of the Puritans.

Now, I have to try to move very quickly onto John Cotton's teaching on assurance. And I'll have to abbreviate here. I have a number of propositions.

The first one, I can simply give you as a heading. Firstly, a man, says Cotton, may have an assurance that he is a Christian, when in reality he is still unregenerate. Well, that was partly covered yesterday.

I need say no more about it. A man may have an assurance that he is a Christian, when in reality he is unregenerate. Secondly, a man, says Cotton, may be savingly joined to Christ, although he has no assurance that he is in a state of grace.

And here I quote him. There be sundry children of Abraham, even of his elect seed, that having been driven out of their sins by a spirit of bondage, and finding a need of Christ, and their own insufficiency and unworthiness to receive him, do therefore seek and wait for him by the mighty power of God. That is to say, God working in them.

And to wait for him in every ordinance and duty. Such men are already truly justified. Though it may be as yet, they do not know so much.

Because, he says, their seeking and waiting for Christ in the sense of their own need and emptiness and unworthiness is a true act of lively, justifying faith, you see what he's saying. A person can be a Christian and not have assurance. Be looking for Christ, waiting for Christ, really they are waiting for assurance.

But in reality, says Cotton, although they don't know it, they already have justifying faith. That's back to John Bunyan. Through the straight gate, but the burden in his own consciousness, not yet off his back.

Thirdly, says Cotton, although sanctification is concurrent with justification, assurance of justification must be before assurance of sanctification. Shall I read that again? Although sanctification is concurrent with justification, assurance of justification should be before assurance of sanctification. We need, says Cotton, to have assurance that God accepts our persons before we are assured that he accepts our works.

It's essential to follow him carefully at this point. In applying redemption to sinners, God first unites men to Christ in effectual calling. And all who are spiritually united to Christ possess a new principle of life, the first act of which is faith.

But although this faith is alone in justification, it is not alone in the believer for that same principle of life is the root of sanctification. In this sense, justification and sanctification are concurrent. And consequently, Cotton and all the Puritans believe that if a person claimed to be justified and yet lacked a hatred of sin and a love for holiness, the claim was false.

Yet, although nobody can be justified who is not sanctified, sanctification or holiness of life should not be made the basis of assurance. Well, Cotton's argument here is as follows. He distinguishes between absolute and conditional promises.

By conditional promise, he means such a promise as says, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God. Or a promise which speaks of those who love the brethren as being the children of God. He means that they are conditional in the sense that when a believer reads those promises, he has to look to himself.

Blessed are they that walk upright. What is my walk? If such and such is true of me, then that promise belongs to me. He calls that a conditional promise.

He calls an absolute promise, a promise which is not related to anything in me at all, but a promise in which God freely justifies the sinner on the grounds of Christ's righteousness alone. And he argues that in justification our assurance is based entirely on absolute promises that we are justified as ungodly. Not because we find in ourselves love to the brethren.

Not because we find that we are poor in spirit, but on the bare, absolute promise of God. He uses the parable of the Pharisee and the publican and the temple. The publican found nothing at all in himself, yet his cotton he went down to his house justified.

So he writes, when the Lord reveals himself graciously by his spirit in our justification, he doth banish the sight of our works, so that the soul doth look at himself as the chiefest of all sinners, as not having so much as the crawling or creeping of a work of sanctification. Well, you see what Cotton is aiming at. Our first assurance has to be based upon absolute promises.

We ought not, we must not, he said, teach young converts to look to themselves for evidence of grace before they can have assurance. Our faith, he says, closes with Christ upon a promise of free grace. Otherwise, as John Calvin says, my faith would always be trembling and wavering as my works be.

Upon a promise of free grace my faith is built. Well, Cotton says a great deal more at this point. And let me just add in my own words.

Cotton is not arguing, and this is so significant. He is not arguing that sanctification is not an evidence of justification. It is.

But what he went on to say was this. Be careful what you mean by sanctification. Because if a person has true sanctification, that comes primarily from faith operating and exercised on the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we were hearing last evening. The coming of the grace of God. That is the source and the motivation of sanctification.

So, Cotton says, nobody should say that I have a sanctification and therefore I must be justified if they don't see in their sanctification the lively exercise of faith in Christ. Because that is the root and the source of sanctification. So, I am now greatly abbreviating his argument.

He is not denying that sanctification is an evidence of justification. But what he is saying is that faith is primary. And that our initial assurance has to be built squarely and solely on the work of Christ.

I say initial assurance. He would really say all our assurance. What he would say would be that any sanctification in us is never a ground of assurance.

But sanctification is an evidence that we have rightly appropriated Christ. It is an evidence of the reality of our faith. But it is not the basis of our assurance.

Fourthly, every degree of assurance, says Cotton, derives from the agency of the Holy Spirit. Every degree. The weakest believer, says Cotton, is sealed by the Spirit of God.

Ephesians 1.13. He has the earnest of the Spirit. But, says Cotton, there is more of the Spirit's work to be received in the life of the Christian. Here, he says, here we have but a little portion of the Spirit.

A little earnest penny. But this little portion is an assurance unto us that He will make it up until we are able to receive no more. No man hath part in Christ, but he has the seal of the Spirit.

For if the Holy Ghost was not given thee, thou couldst not have believed at all. True it is indeed, there are many Christians, yea, unsealed Christians, which have not the full consolation. Not every Christian has received that measure of power.

You see, he is distinguishing there between full assurance and the beginnings of assurance. And I haven't time to develop it, but my argument under that fourth point is that every degree of assurance comes from the Holy Spirit. Now, I move on to a reassessment of the modern interpretation.

It was said above that John Cotton's views were really the views of Anne Hutchinson and that she was really only popularizing Cotton. I argue that that is entirely false. Now, my argument will have to be abbreviated here too, but here are the points.

If you read these modern authors, this is what they generally say. Mrs. Hutchinson was a pupil of Cotton's. Well, Mrs. Hutchinson never sat under John Cotton until she came to Boston in 1634.

She was under his preaching for a short time. And the evidence is that Mrs. Hutchinson came over the Atlantic with her basic errors. In other words, she never learned them from John Cotton at all.

She already had them when she crossed the Atlantic. I believe that there is abundant evidence to prove that statement. Now, of course, some of you who have read the books know that back in old England, Mrs. Hutchinson lived just 24 miles from where John Cotton preached in Boston, Lincolnshire.

And from that, authors have argued that Mrs. Hutchinson used to happily ride along on her husband's horse to go and hear John Cotton. But, of course, that is nonsense. 24 miles is a long way.

A day's ride. And what's more, back in old England, Mrs. Hutchinson had 17 pregnancies in a matter of the years that she was supposed to be riding to hear John Cotton. She was a very busy housewife.

Well, and yet, if you read some of these books, you get beautiful pictures of her jogging along on her horse. There's not the slightest shred of evidence that she sat under Cotton in England. Now, secondly, against this modern interpretation, the facts are against it.

In that, John Cotton himself and the ministers of New England repudiated the existence of any gulf between them. That is to say, John Cotton denied that he was divided from his brethren and they denied that they were divided from him. Now, there's too much to be said on that subject to go into it here.

But, I believe that that could be demonstrated. And we have to be thankful to a man called Robert Bailey, who I'm sorry to say was a very fearsome Harry Scott, and a great hater of independence and Congregationalists. And in 1645, Robert Bailey wrote a book against the Congregationalists of New England and he bitterly attacked John Cotton, and amongst other things he attacked Cotton for being a supporter of Mrs. Hutchinson.

Well, that led Cotton to answer this charge and he answers it fully. And yet it's quite amazing how modern authors ignore the reply that Cotton made. And, in brief, he argued that Mrs. Hutchinson's claim that her views were those of Cotton were wholly false.

Now, the modern books say that Cotton was against the ministers of New England, and that's why the controversy lasted so long. But this is what Cotton says. Cotton says that the ministers of New England were deliberately misled about his teaching by the Hutchinsonians.

That is to say, they spread as his opinions what were not his opinions at all. It's a very interesting thing and I hope that some of you can read it in more detail. But, when the ministers of New England came to John Cotton and they said, do you teach this? He said, no.

Well, they said, if you don't, you better say so from your pulpit. So he did. And when he did, the ministers went to the Hutchinsonians and they said, Cotton denies it.

Oh, they said, well, he may in the pulpit, but you should hear what he says to us in secret. And that sort of thing was fed through the colony until, by slander and misrepresentation, Cotton's whole position was jeopardized. Now, let me just give you in a few words the differences between Cotton and Mrs. Hutchinson.

Mrs. Hutchinson taught that there was no assurance except through a direct witness of the Spirit giving full assurance. Cotton did not so teach. She taught that full assurance accompanies justification.

That was not Cotton's position. She held that no work of grace in the soul, neither faith nor sanctification, could be regarded as evidence of salvation. Justification and all assurance were radically separated from sanctification.

Cotton reprobated that opinion. He called it antinomian. And not seeing what Anne Hutchinson was propagating behind his back, he did not at first appreciate why his fellow ministers were so concerned to stress that sanctification is an evidence of justification.

My time is almost gone. Let me pass to my brief conclusions. I have two conclusions.

One is that the modern treatment of the assurance controversy is a clear reminder that church history, as well as the Bible, can fare very unhappily at the hands of liberals. Enough has been written on the New England Puritans to show us the worth of George Ellis' remark that a man can understand the jargon if he has an unabridged dictionary. That's not true.

A man has to first understand the New Testament. And only when he does that can he understand such matters as this. Martin Luther said in the 16th century, he complained of those interpreters who, with unwashed feet and hands, leap into the Holy Scriptures and bring with them their human inclination.

They do their thinking about God with the same sureness with which they argue about a pig or a cow. Well, that did not end with the 16th century. And if this controversy teaches us anything, it teaches us that if we have to understand the Puritans, we must read them first-hand.

There's no other security against being misled. And secondly, this word shows us the fertile cause of so many controversies. And that is pride.

Pride of new opinions. Mrs. Hutchinson says Winthrop was a proud dame, a woman of ambitious spirit. She cast discredit upon the ministers as legalists and she did so, alas, to advance her own cause.

Let me close with this quotation from Anthony Burgess. He says, Do not affect applause among people as having found some new, nearer way to Christ and grace than others have. I have observed this itching humor in the antinomian sermons, printed, where they call upon their hearers to mark that if they shall hear this, they will hear what they have not heard before, which is false.

Or if it be true, it is no more than ordinarily taught by others. Now he says, This reminds me of Phazon, the Libyan. It is reported of this man Phazon, that he kept ten tame birds at home and he taught them to sing Great is God Phazon.

And when he had done so, he let these birds fly into the woods and mountains where all the other birds learned the same song. And when the Libyans, perceiving and thinking it was no plot, but a divine accident, when they heard these birds, they decreed that sacrifice should be made to Phazon and that he should be put among the number of the gods. Well, that's very like this whole controversy.

My friends and brethren, pride is the root cause of so many controversies and so many divisions and pride was the fertile cause of this controversy. I therefore exhort you to look into it further yourselves but to read at first hand the Puritans, John Cotton, Hooker and his brethren. Let us pray.

O Lord, our gracious God, we pray that we may be humble before Thee. How little we understand of Thy ways. How great Thou art and how small is our experience of that grace which is in Christ Jesus.

We pray that we may know Thee. We pray that Thy Holy Spirit this day may continue to help us and lead us in our fellowship together, in our hearing of Thy Word. Lord, grant that we may truly grow and that together we may know the consciousness of Thy presence in our midst.

Hear our prayers and receive our thanks and praise for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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